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Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

George P. Hambrecht

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A B R A H A M L I N C O L N

Synopsis of An Address by Geo. P. Hambrecht

Delivered at Antigo, Wisconsin

June 8, 1921

at the

Annual Campfire of the State Encampment

of the

Grand Army of the Republic

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

- By -

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America has produced splendid types of manhood and womanhood for leadership - Washington, whom we reverence, Jefferson, whom we admire, and Lincoln, whom we love. Our love for Lincoln is inspired because of his great sympathy and love for humanity, - a love intermingled with all of his other sterling qualities, coupled with courage and ability, which enabled him to accomplish splendid results in the upbuilding of American ideals. This great love is well expressed in a quotation from his last interview with Joshua F. Speed, his life-long friend and confidant. Speed was present upon the occasion when Lincoln unconditionally pardoned all those who had been imprisoned for resisting the draft in Western Pennsylvania. He requested General Dana to bring him the entire list and said: "These fellows have suffered long enough, and I have thought so for some time, and now that my mind is on the subject I believe I will turn out the whole flock." Turning to Speed Lincoln then said: "Speed, die when I may, I want it said of me by those who knew me best that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower when I thought a flower would grow."

It gives me great pleasure to say a few words concerning Abraham Lincoln. It has been my privilege for many years to collect data and material concerning his life and I believe that he stands today, and will stand in all future time, as the typical American.

Lincoln was not an uneducated man although he had but limited schooling. His indomitable courage and ambition made him a leader among the scholars at his time. It may be truly said that he graduated from "The University of Hard Knocks." Schooling is only one avenue to education. Lincoln took the other road beset with many difficulties, and by hard work, close application, study of books, and self culture, reached the coveted goal designating him an educated man.

Born on the frontier, the vanguard of civilization, he became a close student of his environment. The frontier was very limited in its number of books and as it taught him to supplement his reading by investigation. All nature was a school from which Lincoln learned the fundamental lesson of investigation - studying causes and results as they came to him in his every day life. No president before or since Lincoln's time ever investigated more subjects nor more thoroughly than he did.

The frontier also taught him caution. One could not be careless with the means of livelihood because it would be impossible to replace some essential implement brought from civilization long distances away. A plow which was broken could not be replaced at a nearby hardware store. The president learned early in life that lesson of caution and it may truly be said that he was the most cautious man of his time. He moved with such cautious firmness that he never had to retrace a step, once taken.

The frontier, also developed the "all 'round nature" in the ambitious boy and at various times in his early life he was farmer, rail splitter, navigator, storekeeper, surveyor, soldier, miller,

and later, lawyer, statesman, financier, and diplomat. This "all 'round" training, from which he gleaned educational knowledge of every change of occupation, he brought to bear upon the problems of state an intimate knowledge of people, affairs, and events rarely acquired by any statesman.

The frontier taught him self-reliance. If he found an obstacle in accomplishing a necessary result - a sand bar, a stump, a difficult problem of merchandising, a knotty problem of law,- he learned to think his way through the difficulty. Members of his cabinet all came to learn that Lincoln "relied" on no one although he sought advice from all sources. He was probably the most self-reliant president this country ever produced. Seward once said: "There is but one vote in the cabinet, and that vote is Lincoln's."

The frontier also taught him simplicity of habits, manner, and language. He used terms, even in diplomatic papers, that could be easily understood by all. When, in the difficulties arising out of the second campaign in 1864, many friendly statesmen were laboriously trying to argue that Lincoln should be retained to finish the work in which he was engaged, he summarized the whole argument by saying "it is never safe to swap horses while crossing a stream." The simplicity of his language and the aptness of the expression in this instance gained him many votes.

On one occasion, a member of his cabinet criticized him for using the word "sugar-coated" in a message to Congress:

"Rebellion thus sugar-coated will not long deceive the American people", stating that "sugar-coated" was a common-place word that

did not belong in a state paper. Lincoln very quickly replied "the time will never come when the American people will fail to understand the meaning of the word 'sugar-coated'."

Probably the best example of his simplicity of style, carrying with it the force of conviction and logical argument, is the Gettysburg Address known by heart by practically every school child in the country.

Extreme poverty during his youth, which he gradually overcame by rigid honesty, frugality, and close application to work, taught him the value of tact in dealing with people. His tactful nature was clearly seen during the Lincoln-Douglas Debate when he put to Douglas the question as to whether he believed the territories should vote on slavery. If Douglas said "yes" it would alienate from him a large portion of the Democratic party; if he answered "no" it would ruin his entire program. Douglas answered "yes" and the result was a split in the Democratic party at the next presidential election.

Lincoln's fame as a story teller illustrated the high degree to which this phase of his nature was developed.

Except for Lincoln's tact, we might have been plunged into war with Great Britain over the unofficial recognition of Confederate delegates at the court of St. James in May 1861. Seward wrote a stinging letter to our minister to Great Britain in which he said among other things that "we intend to have a clear record of every issue with Great Britain." Lincoln "blue-pencilled" this statement indicating his displeasure of such language. In

this letter, Seward further stated that "the President is surprised and grieved", Lincoln corrected it so as to have it read "the president regrets"; Lincoln further changed the letter by striking out the word "wrongful" in a certain paragraph and inserted instead the word "hurtful." He changed the phrase "the law of nature" to "our own laws." He struck out six of seven descriptive words describing a certain event; changed the word "crime" to the word "error", and finally struck out this phrase from the concluding paragraph:

"We cannot tolerate intervention, - twice enemies,
and we may be forced again."

To this one act, correcting a state paper fraught with grave responsibilities, Lincoln demonstrated his power to investigate, governed by experience which made him cautious but wholly self-reliant, his insistence upon simple language, tact, and courage, culminating in statesmanship of the highest order.

The frontier also taught him bravery and courage. After thinking a problem through and convinced of the righteousness of the cause, he was willing to stand alone for his expressed ideal. Early, during his debates with Douglas, he applied the quotation "a house divided against itself cannot stand" to the slavery question. This brought down upon him a storm of criticism but he was courageous enough to voice the statement that seemed to him an inevitable conclusion. On another occasion when he was severely criticized he replied, "let us have faith that right makes might."

During the war period, it would have been easy for him to follow the advice of many close friends and make slavery the

paramount issue, but his letter to Horace Greeley shows his courage of conviction when he said "my paramount object is to save the Union and not either to save or destroy slavery." He never agreed with extremists and believed probably more fundamentally than is common among public men that our form of government permits us to enjoy "liberty under law."

President Lincoln was able to be simple and at the same time great; courteous, and at the same time courageous; yielding and sympathetic, and at the same time a splendid executive; - a combination of virtues seldom found in one man. Although members of his cabinet first underestimated him, later belittled him, again lost confidence in him, they finally came to recognize in him the real leader among men, and Stanton, probably the most critical of all, said, when Lincoln closed his eyes for the last time, "He now belongs to the age, - here lies the most perfect ruler of men the world has ever known."

